

## History 463/563

### “Labor Days: The Working-Class Experience in the U. S., 1945-Present”

Fall 2022: Lillis 175  
Tues/Th. 4:00-5:20 pm

Bob Bussel  
[bussel@uoregon.edu](mailto:bussel@uoregon.edu)  
541 743-1403

Office Hours: Wednesday, 3:30-5:00 pm  
or by appointment  
McKenzie 315

Consider these recent headlines:

- “Starbucks Union Surpasses 200-Store Milestone”
- “Amazon Workers Win Historic Vote on Staten Island”
- “Striketober”: American Workers Take to the Picket Lines”
- “Hard-Hit Working Mothers May See Lasting Damage”
- “Americans’ Approval of Labor Unions Hits Near 60-Year High”

As these headlines suggest, what activists and intellectuals once called the “labor question” has returned to a prominent place in our public discourse.

Spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, social protest movements, and persistent economic inequality, workers in the United States have been asking many “labor questions.” We have seen an outbreak of strikes, attempts to organize unions at major corporations, and demands for a greater voice in the workplace. The pandemic created what some have called “The Great Resignation,” leading some to leave their jobs or rethink their assumptions about the meaning and value of work. Our social vocabulary reflects this growing sense of unease and militancy. We now hear the frequent use of terms such as “essential work,” “working class,” “quiet quitting,” and the “future of work” that convey the greater attention being paid to the labor question in our times.

This course will focus on the period between 1945-present. It will take us on a journey through the peak of union and working-class power following World War II and a long period of decline that accelerated in the 1980s and has largely continued to present day. In choosing a shorter chronological time frame, I intend to examine more recent developments in greater depth while taking care to place these developments in historical context.

Our inquiry will pay special attention to the following subjects:

- The varied strategies and tactics used by workers to enhance their bargaining power and exert social influence with a special emphasis on the role of labor unions and other forms of worker organization.

- The impact of race, gender, ethnic, and cultural identity on working-class consciousness and the complex considerations that frame our thinking about social class.
- The evolution of business approaches to workplace governance and management.
- The role of government, the legal system, and politics in shaping labor relations and the fortunes of the working class.
- The ideological arguments that key social actors have made about the distribution of power and the exercise of authority in the workplace.
- The domestic shift from a manufacturing to a service and information economy, the rise of a global economy, the transformation of work caused by technological advances, and changes in the employment relationship that have affected the working-class experience.

We will use a variety of primary and secondary sources to assist us in our exploration of the working-class experience, including historical monographs, fiction, film, art, and oral histories. These sources will enable us to consider the labor question from a variety of perspectives and allow students to evaluate the relative merits of different kinds of historical materials.

### **Course Objectives**

- Gain a greater understanding of the forces that have shaped the working-class experience and the fortunes of the union movement over the last 75 years.
- Expand awareness of history as a discipline, especially the role of evidence, analysis, and interpretation in constructing historical arguments and placing social action in historical context.
- Appreciate the value of different forms of source material in contributing to historical understanding.
- Develop analytical, writing, and oral communication skills through assignments and engagement in class discussion.

### **Class Requirements**

- I. **Essay I: 4-6 pages due October 20**
- II. **Essay II: 5-7 pages due November 17**
- III. **Final Essay: due December 9**
- IV. **Weekly Reaction Papers (explained in separate handout)**

## Academic Honesty

Academic honesty is essential to one's personal integrity and the integrity of the class. Plagiarism or other forms of cheating are serious offenses and are unacceptable.

## Office Hours

I will be available during official office hours or by appointment throughout the term, so do not hesitate to ask for alternative times that are convenient for you.

## Communication

I encourage you to check Canvas frequently for updates and announcements. Please let me know if you are not receiving Canvas notifications in a timely manner.

Feel free to email, telephone, or text me. In most cases I can respond on the same day as your message or on the next day at the latest.

## Class Format

Tuesday's class will feature an interactive lecture, and I will often bring in primary sources or other materials to supplement the lecture portion of the class.

On Thursdays, I will offer a shorter lecture and then leave time for us to discuss our weekly readings.

## Grading

- |                                                   |            |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 1. <i>4-6 page essay</i>                          | <i>20%</i> |
| 2. <i>5-7 page essay</i>                          | <i>25%</i> |
| 3. <i>Final paper</i>                             | <i>40%</i> |
| 4. <i>Class participation and reaction papers</i> | <i>15%</i> |

Late work will be penalized by one half-letter grade for each day it is overdue, unless there is prior notification that the work will be late, and we agree on a completion time.

## Graduate Students

Graduate students taking this course for credit as History 563 will write a 12-15 page paper due at the end of the term as their major class assignment. This assignment is in lieu of the essay and final paper requirements for undergraduates.

A prospectus outlining your topic will be due by October 20. Graduate students will also meet separately with the instructor on several occasions during the term to discuss the weekly readings. I will get in touch with you soon to schedule these meetings.

## **Inclusive Learning Environment**

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center in 360 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or [uoaec@uoregon.edu](mailto:uoaec@uoregon.edu).

## **Readings**

Books for the course are available at the UO Bookstore. They are:

- Cheri Register: *Packinghouse Daughter: A Memoir*
- William Adler: *Mollie's Job: A Story of Life and Work on the Global Assembly Line*

Other class readings can be found on Canvas. I will also place copies of the books and other readings on reserve in Knight Library.

## **Class Schedule**

**Week 1: September 27, 29: “War and Peace: The Working Class and the Union Movement After World War II”**

### **Readings**

- A. Philip Randolph, “March on Washington Presents Program for the Negro” (1944)

**Week 2: October 4, 6: “The Empire Strikes Back”: Containment and Consolidation in the 1940s and 1950s”**

### **Readings**

- Lemuel Boulware: “Salvation Is Not Free” (1949)
- Walter Reuther: “Labor and the Community” (1947)
- “Responses to Unionism: Unionism and Personal Liberty” (Reuther v. Goldwater, 1953)

**Week 3: October 11, 13: “Stormy Weather”: Labor Power and Working-Class Division in the 1950s**

**Reading**

- Cheri Register: *Packinghouse Daughter*, pp. 1-129.

**Week 4: October 18, 20: Power and Pushback: A Bumpy Road to “Mature Labor Relations”**

**Reading**

- Cheri Register: *Packinghouse Daughter*, pp. 133-273.

*First Paper Due: October 20*

**Week 5: October 25, 27: “Labor in the Age of Aquarius” (I)**

**Reading**

- Studs Terkel: *Working*: pp. xxxi-xxxviii, xlv-xlix, 7-14, 41-59, 137-143, 159-164, 293-298, 366-373, 376-380, 501-504, 507-510.

**Week 6: November 1, 3: “Labor in the Age of Aquarius” (II)**

**Readings**

- *The Triple Revolution* (1964)
- “*The Powell Memo*” (1971)

**Week 7: November 8, 10: “That 70’s and 80’s Show”: Structural Change and Working-Class Responses**

**Readings**

- William Adler: *Mollie’s Job*, pp. 11-165

**Week 8: November 15, 17: Globalization and Its Discontents****Reading**

- William Adler: *Mollie's Job*, pp. 166-313

*Second Paper Due: November 17*

**Week 9: November 22, (no class on November 24): The Labor Question at the Dawn of the New Century**

**Readings** (none for this week)

**Week 10: November 29, December 1: Back to the Future: The Working-Class in the Age of COVID****Readings**

Lisa R. Pruitt: "What Republicans Know (and Democrats Don't) About the White Working Class"

Ta-Nehesi Coates: "Donald Trump Is the First White President"